

Cross Currents

The US-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON), a binational advisory panel to the US and Japanese governments, is currently developing a project called Cross Currents that will be a new and innovative digital teaching resource on US-Japan cultural and educational relations over the past fifty years. With the profound interdependence already and ineluctably in place between our two countries, it is vital that we prepare our citizens, beginning with our youth, to manage this vital relationship effectively. This project is the first we are aware of to harness the power of the Internet to the subject of the interrelatedness that US and Japanese societies have developed over the past fifty years. It is an important step in addressing the need to educate our youth.

A prototype of Cross Currents, developed by a team from San Diego State University led by Dr. Bob Hoffman, was reviewed in May, 2001 at CULCON's twentieth plenary session. It is now ready for full development.

Cross Currents is a project to collect and digitize (as needed) multimedia resources on US-Japan educational and cultural relations from the last 50 years, and make them accessible in a variety of ways, to elementary, secondary and post-secondary students and teachers, as well as the general public. The project will provide practical frameworks for teaching and learning that will support instructors and students in a variety of educational settings and feature active learning strategies that foster problem-solving and cross-cultural exchange. The goal of the project is to promote individual understanding of the many cultural and educational influences between the US and Japan, and to help combat years of harmful stereotyping.

The final project will take the form of a bilingual multimedia web site, which is rich in multi-media content (music, images, speech, drama, and virtual environments) culled from a variety of sources. Cross Currents will contain approximately 16,000 media items; photographs, drawings, maps, charts, plus sound and video clips that illustrate the last 50 years of US-Japanese relations. It will also be rich in embedded links to related sites and statistical and other forms of data. The site will be dynamically generated for every visitor, drawing text and media from a single underlying database, based on the user's computer, connection speed and preferences. The project will use advanced but not novel technologies.

The current Cross Currents design is structured into three parallel threads: Japan, Currents, and United States. Each thread is divided into ten themes. Each theme contains 1-6 sections and each section has 1-12 media items (photos, graphics, text, audio, video) that tell an important part of the story.

Cross Currents has a strong language learning component. It is rich in multi-media resources with accompanying explanations in both English and Japanese. The user often has the ability to hear and/or read materials in either language and to switch easily between the two languages.

The initial phase of the project was funded by the Japan-US Friendship Commission, and the US Department of State as well as by the Japan Foundation and Japanese governmental sources. A total of approximately \$200,000 has been required to produce the prototype. The budget for full development of the prototype is expected to be a total of \$2 million over the next three years.